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SUBJECT: OBASANJO NOT DOING WELL ACCORDING NASSARAWA STATE GOVERNOR ADAMU: BUT MAY BE THE BEST WE CAN DO

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER FOR REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On February 16, Governor Alhaji Abdullah Adamu warmly welcomed Ambassador Jeter him as the first American Ambassador to ever visit Nassarawa State. Adamu noted that the dangers to democracy were mounting and gave low marks to Obasanjo as a politician and a communicator. However, Adamu did not see an alternative to Obasanjo in 2003; for the sake of stability he thought Obasanjo should return to office. Adamu believed that Ibrahim Babangida, too clearly identified with military rule, would garner little popular support. End Summary

¶12. (C) During a February 15 visit to Benue State, the Ambassador, stopped in the capital city of Lafia to visit Nassarawa Governor Abdullah Adamu. Adamu, head of the Governor's Forum, is a well respected political figure who prefers to do most of his work behind the scenes and outside the public glare.

¶13. (C) Adamu stated that Nigeria, politically, was "not well." According to Adamu, two major problems plague Nigeria as it moves toward the 2003 elections. First, there is a systematic, deliberate intention by some to undermine democracy by constantly focusing on its failures without offering solutions. These attacks are effective because "expectations for democracy were high and Nigerians' patience is low."

¶14. (C) Second, poverty, and youth unemployment are being exploited by certain well-heeled Nigerians, especially retired military officers who were flushed out of political positions upon the return to democracy. Adamu implied that these provocateurs could exploit poverty by shelling out Naira to foment unrest and violence along ethnic, religious and regional lines. The Governor suggested that although these people may not be colluding consciously, they have a common enemy in the government and their efforts collectively have seriously injured the Obasanjo Administration.

¶15. (C) Assessing Obasanjo's chances of re-election, Adamu said that the President had lost popularity in the North because he failed to give enough attention to the states in that region. People were feeling a sense of betrayal. However, "when the chips are down" some of the Northern leaders will "forgive and support him." Adamu contended that Obasanjo still has a problem with his fellow Yorubas, who have never forgiven him for not manipulating the 1979 election in favor of Awolowo.

¶16. (C) The Governor scored Obasanjo low on political strategy, public relations and information management. He cited the Electoral Act as an example of Obasanjo's failing. He suggested that the bill could have been worked in a way that would not have pitted the central government against the governors and much of the rest of the country. Instead, the Administration had allowed the tenure of local governments to become a major political issue.

¶17. (C) Despite Obasanjo's problems, Adamu did not see an alternative that could stabilize the country. While the name of former Head of State Ibrahim Babangida is on the lips of many as an emerging contender, Adamu discounted the idea of a Babangida presidency. Because he is so closely associated with military rule and all of the abuses that emerged from it, Adamu thought an IBB candidacy would open old wounds and could destabilize the country, "That's not the way to sincerely fight corruption," he stressed.

¶18. (C) Governor Adamu thought the United States should encourage Obasanjo and the country to support democratic continuity and sustain Nigeria's democratic institutions. "If we don't handle the transition well, it will create problems we can't estimate," he concluded.

19. (C) Comment: Adamu does not seek the spotlight as much as some his gubernatorial colleagues but he is considered an astute politician whose views are respected by his peers. Adamu is part of a growing chorus lamenting the state of national politics and criticizing the President's performance; however, his view that currently there is no alternative figure who can better stabilize the country is telling. His low estimation of a potential Babangida candidacy is a reminder that many along the political elite as well as ordinary citizens, see a Babangida candidacy as a potential step backwards. End Comment

JETER